DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 409 CG 006 414

AUTHOR Sherman, Steven J.
TITLE The Effects of Perceived Locus of Control and Social Influence Techniques on Attitude Change.
INSTITUTION Indiana Univ., Bloomington.
PUB DATE 8 May 71
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association Convention in Detroit, Michigan, May 6-8, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes, Behavioral Science Research, *Changing Attitudes, *College Students, Group Dynamics, *Role Playing, Social Attitudes, *Social Environment, *Social Influences

ABSTRACT

This study deals with the interaction between social influence technique and locus of control, internal or external to oneself, on attitude change. In a persuasive communication situation, where effectiveness depends on the receiver feelings controlled and subject to influence from outside sources, externals ought to show more attitude change than internals. On the other hand, counter-attitudinal behavior, i.e., role playing, should be effective to the extent that one doesn't feel externally constrained and views himself as a causal agent of his rewards and behavior. Results indicated that: (1) with role playing behavior, low externals showed significantly more change; (2) with persuasive messages, high and low externals didn't differ significantly; and (3) high and low external controls didn't differ in change scores. Thus, the relative efficacy of social influence techniques depends on perceived locus of control of subjects. (Author/TA)

ED050409

The Effects of Perceived Locus of Control & Social Influence Technique on Attitude Change

Steven J. Sherman

Indiana University

Midwestern Psychological Association

May 8, 1971

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

CG 006 414

Rotter's (1966) control construct is viewed as a generalized expectancy relating to whether or not one feels he has power over what happens to him. According to Rotter's notions, internal control refers to the perception of events as consequences of one's own action and thus under personal control. External control refers to the perception of events as unrelated to one's own behavior, beyond personal control, and determined by external sources (luck, other people, etc.). Phares (1955), Rotter (1966), and others have maintained that this internal-external control dimension is measurable as a personality variable, and as such is quite useful in understanding other individual attitudinal and behavioral differences.

One finding concerning differences between internals and externals that is of particular interest is the fact that externals seem more easily influenced by others and conform more than do internals (Odell, 1959; Crowne & Liverant, 1963). Such a finding seems consistent with the locus of control conception: internals ought to be resistant to outside manipulation attempts while externals have low expectancy for success of their own behavior.

The greater suggestibility, attitude change, and conformity displayed by externals has thus been shown in situations where one is confronted by discrepant judgments of others (as in a conformity situation) or discrepant and persuasive messages (as in a Hovland-type attitude change situation). What should one expect, however, when the inconsistency leading to attitude change is not between one's own beliefs and the beliefs of another, but between one's own beliefs and his own behavior? This is quite a different social influence situation, referred to in the literature as role playing or counter-attitudinal behavior. In this case, one is induced to engage in some behavior (make a speech, write an essay) which is inconsistent with his previously expressed attitude concerning some issue. Under certain conditions, we find that "saying is believing" -- one's attitude changes in the direction of the discrepant behavior. Both dissonance theory and Bem's (1967) interpretation of the forced compliance situation stress

the role of psychological freedom and external justification in accounting for attitude change following counter-attitudinal behavior. To the extent that one feels he had no choice, was not responsible for, and has external justification for such behavior, attitude change will not occur. When one feels he was free and responsible for his behavior and cannot account for it on the basis of external events, attitude change is predicted. Many situational manipulations in the forced compliance setting have been made which vary external justification and thus degree of attitude change (e.g., choice, threat of punishment, offer of incentive). The findings are well accepted--the less the external justification, the more the change.

If we consider the internal-external control dimension of Rotter, there ought to be some difference in self-external attribution of behavior. High externals ought to attribute their behavior more easily to external sources while high internals should see their behavior more in their own control. To the extent that this is true, given that discrepant behavior is induced, internals (who should feel less external justification for behavior) should show more attitude change.

This present study, then, deals with the interaction between social influence technique and locus of control on attitude change. In a persuasive communication situation, where effectiveness depends on the receiver feeling controlled and subject to influence from outside sources, externals ought to show more attitude change than internals. On the other hand, counter-attitudinal behavior should be effective to the extent that one doesn't feel externally constrained and views himself as a causal agent of his rewards and behavior. From this analysis, internals should change more following discrepant behavior.

To test this prediction, 40 undergraduates either read persuasive arguments against a lowered voting age or wrote counter-attitudinal essays against a lower voting age. Half the subjects in each influence technique condition were high Externals according to Rotter's scale and half were low Externals. Additionally,

10 high and 10 low Externals served as controls (attitudes measured without influence attempt). A pre-post design was employed and change scores were noted on a 31 point scale.

The data appear on Table 1. A 2 x 2 analysis of variance revealed a significan interaction between control expectancy and influence technique ($F_{1,36} = 5.04$; $p \leq .05$). A series of planned comparison further showed:

(1) With counter-attitudinal essays, low Externals showed significantly more change ($F_{1,36} = 4.34$; $p \leq .05$).

(2) With persuasive communications, high and low Externals didn't differ significantly, although the results are quite strongly in the prediction direction.

(3) High and low External controls didn't differ in change scores.

The finding that the relative efficacy of social influence techniques depends on perceived locus of control of subjects has implications both for understanding differences between individuals who differ in perceived locus of control and more importantly for understanding the processes through which different social influence techniques operate.

References

Bem, D. J. Self-perception: An alternative interpretation of cognitive dissonance phenomena. Psych. Rev., 1967, 74, 138-200.

Crowne, P. P. & Liverant, S. Conformity under varying conditions of personal commitment. Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology, 1963, 66, 547-555.

Odell, M. Personality correlates of independence and conformity. Unpublished master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1959.

Phares, E. J. Changes in expectancy in skill and chance situations. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1955.

Rotter, J. B. Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. Psychological Monographs, 1966, 80 (1, Whole no. 609).

Table 1

Attitude Change Atainst A Lower Voting Age*

Social Influence Technique	Control Expectancy: Low External	Control Expectancy: High External
Persuasive Message	.7	2.8
Counter-Attitudinal Behavior	3.7	-.3
Control	-.6	-1.4

*N = 10 for all conditions. Positive scores are changes against a lower voting age. Negative scores are changes more positive to a lower voting age. Responses were made on a 31 point scale.